

The Green Approach

**Can a Warehouse and a Wildlife Habitat Coexist?
Security Storage Did It, and Saved Money, Too.**

By Sean Kilcarr
Special to Direction

It was awarded an Exceptional Merit Certificate by the National Wildlife Federation last year.

Sean Kilcarr is senior editor of Fleet Owner magazine. He can be reached at www.fleetowner.com.

When you first drive up to Security Storage Moving Logistics' warehouse in Dulles, Va., a few things quickly catch your eye.

While the traditional "concrete box" design of the building is a familiar sight to anyone in the moving and storage industry, the dead trees, tall grasses, and riot of flowers surrounding the building stand out like sore thumbs.

Upon closer inspection, bird houses dot the building's perimeter, along with marsh lands that would be more at home in Florida's everglades rather than a few miles south of Dulles International airport.

Many of Security's neighbors at first wondered what was going on and, more importantly, why the company wasn't mowing the grass — letting a full three acres of its nine-acre property get overgrown this way.

They soon found out that it was all a deliberate effort on Security's part to achieve several goals. Michael Kerns, Security's manager of safety and compliance, said the so-called "marsh lands" surrounding the buildings perimeter were designed and built to create a backyard wildlife habitat.

It's one of only 11 such habitats to be awarded an Exceptional Merit Certificate and be certified by the National Wildlife Federation last year. It also serves another purpose: acting as a natural filter to ground runoff water by using specific grasses and plants that literally feed off of contaminants, like acid rain.

"We let everything grow naturally, which is why to some eyes it may look unkempt," he explained. "But aside from the environmental benefits of this habitat, there's an economic one as well — we are not spending money on weekly lawn and landscape maintenance, which is saving us a lot."

There's an image aspect as well. The Commonwealth of Virginia has not only given Security an award for its environmental management system (EMS), of which the habitat is but one element, but the company has actually organized tours of the facility so other companies can learn from Security's "green" efforts.

"A lot of people look at trucking and transportation businesses as polluting nuisances," said Kerns. "By doing this, we're showing them that we are not only a good corporate citizen, we're innovators too. We're also looking to significantly raise the bar in our industry by doing things like this, to set a stan-



Micheal Kerns

dard for others to follow.”

Forward Thinking

“Doing things differently” is sort of an unspoken mantra at Security, which may be just one reason the company has been in business for well over a century.

Founded in 1890, Security is one of the oldest moving and storage companies in the United States – but Kerns stressed that the firm doesn’t rest on its laurels as it constantly tries to push the envelope to develop new ways to handle what many view as a very traditional business.

For starters, Security was among the first companies to move away from the multi-story warehouse into single-level facilities where household goods – containerized at the residence – are stored and then later delivered to the customer in the same unopened container.

The company also was among the first to employ bar code inventory technology and Internet-accessible information technology, offering online access to customers.

When it came time to expand its warehouse network to eight facilities – constructing the Dulles building three years ago – Security again broke the mold.

From the very beginning, the 130,000 square foot facility used completely new concepts in building design, storage, and environmental impact.

For starters, Security constructed the facility using “tilt up” concrete walls – walls poured on the ground as single slabs, then tilted into an upright position and locked together. Not only did this process increase the structural strength of the building, it garnered an award from the American Concrete Association.

Security then created several distinct storage areas: a 1,000 square foot high value, high security vault; a 38-foot high general storage area; and a 65-foot specialized “high bay” area for storing up to 800 20-foot long steel ISO containers.

The “high bay” is an interesting departure from typical warehousing methods, said Kerns. “The containers we use are real shipping containers made in Turkey, but they are certified as fire proof,” he said.

“We also have a 20-ton computer-controlled crane that rearranges and stores these containers automatically – it can ready a container for inspection in 30 minutes for a customer, as opposed to the three or

four hours it would take if we had to do it manually.”

The crane is a safer method, too – no humans are put in harm’s way and, as the crane is electrically powered, no pollution is produced. Kerns added that this “crane and container” storage system is the only one of its kind in the nation.

Wildflowers bloom in every direction, adding a riot of color to the concrete face of Security’s building.

“It’s all automated and we have three computer systems running ‘in parallel’ so that if even if two of them fail, the crane can keep operating,” he said.

On the Ground

Outside of Security’s Dulles warehouse, however, is where traditional business approaches were really

abandoned. The decision to create a backyard wildlife habitat around the facility stemmed from a confluence of events: the company’s decision to obtain ISO 9000, and then ISO 14000, certification; the development of its EMS program; and the insistence of company President Charles Lawrence.

“Two of his main concerns are the well-being of our employees and the environment,” said Kerns. “Because of that, one of the first projects handed to me when I joined three years ago was to upgrade warehouse fire detection systems at our headquarters. Then, partly due to our international focus, we began looking at environmental issues.”





He said Lawrence in particular wanted to adopt many of the stricter environmental standards used in Europe, largely to set an example for moving companies in this country.

To that end, Kerns spent two years developing and implementing the company's EMS plan – a plan that got the company named an Exemplary Environmental Enterprise or E3 by Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) this year.

Achieving the E3 level is an indication that the facility has a fully implemented environmental management system, a pollution prevention program and a record of sustained compliance, according to the DEQ.

It was not an easy process, stressed Kerns, as it required numerous details to be covered: fuel spill clean up, tracking environmental compliance, even how the company removed sawdust residue from pallet and box construction to protect both employees and the environment.

"It's a very tedious process," said Kerns, noting that the safety and compliance plan – in which the EMS program plays a major role – is as thick as a telephone book. "We have to list all the regulatory agencies – from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to the fire marshal and Environmental Protection Agency – and every single environmental rule we must comply with."

He also noted that developing this EMS plan isn't a one-shot deal – to retain E3 certification, Security must continually improve upon what it is doing. "A lot of work went into this and still goes into it," said Kerns.

All of this extra work may seem extreme – and expensive – to many firms, but not when viewed in conjunction with Security's past.

A Proud History

In 1889, a group of Washington and Philadelphia bankers laid the company's foundations by forming

the American Security and Trust Company, later to become American Security Bank, with the aim of "carrying on in the District of Columbia a safe deposit, trust, loan and mortgage business."

According to company history, American Security's then-president, Colonel Alexander T. Britton, was building a new home on Scott Circle on 16th Street in Washington.

The story goes that he dreaded subjecting his family to the horrors of the methods then in general use for moving household goods. In those days, moving meant arranging packing services with local merchants such as the furniture store, the bookstore, the clock store, the china and glassware shop, then hiring the corner drayman to move the possessions in an open-bodied wagon.

Colonel Britton knew that some of the leading families in New York City had built fireproof storage warehouses large enough to hold contents of entire households. Borrowing this idea from the Astors and the Iselins, he expanded the original concept of a safe deposit activity for his company into a "Storage and Safe Deposit Department."

At the end of 1890, the company had built a castle-like, fireproof warehouse at 1140 15th Street NW in Washington D.C. The first story of its turreted Romanesque façade was of rusticated granite, with five upper stories having 42-inch-thick brick walls.

It was only the third fireproof warehouse to be constructed in the United States for the storage of furniture, the others two having been built in New York.

Elevators in the original multi-story warehouse were designed to hold entire vans loaded with furniture so that the vehicle could be taken directly to the floor where the goods were to be stored, keeping customers' property safe while saving time and labor.

In 1895, Security officials discovered that cold storage prevented fur pelts from drying out, and so was the first to build refrigerated vaults for the safe storage of furs through the summer months. Cold storage was also used for moth control.

In 1897, thanks to an inspired young assistant manager, Clarence Aspinwall, Security wrote the very first insurance policy to cover an overseas shipment of household goods. In fact, today the company still works with the descendant of the original underwriter, now the largest ocean marine insurer in North America.

In 1905, Security Storage Company formally came into being – and new tactics and technology continued to be deployed. In 1927, Security developed a fleet of all-steel liftvans that provided maximum security and

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reduced ocean freight charges. These liftvans were the forerunners of the containers built by railroads and steamship lines later in the century.

Looking Forward

In response to changing market conditions Security began a diversification program in 1958 that continues to this day, purchasing real estate, expanding services, entering new fields and forming subsidiaries such as the Federal Forwarding Company, Security Travel and Security International.

In the mid 1960s, after merging with Federal Storage Company, Security sold its original warehouse on 15th Street to the Washington Post Company which tore it down to make room for a parking lot.

The Security headquarters then moved into Federal's warehouse at 1701 Florida Avenue, from which Security still operates. In 1999, the company changed its name to Security Moving Storage Logistics as a reflection of its various business services.

Security now provides a complete range of local, national and international residential and commercial moving services, as well as full storage and logistics-inventory services in nine facilities in the Washington metropolitan area.

The company was recently awarded FAIM (FIDI Accredited National Mover) ISO certification by FIDI, the International Federation of Furniture Movers. It was one of the first U.S. companies to receive FAIM ISO and was recently audited to maintain that certification and upgrade it to a higher standard.

One of the founding pioneers of the interstate van line concept, Security is today an authorized agent of both United Van Lines and Mayflower – winning the President's Quality

continued on page 23

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Award from United in 2001.

Spend a little time on the outskirts around Security's warehouse, however, and the more subtle virtues of the company's decision to develop a wildlife habitat are revealed.

Bird and unique butterfly houses have helped return many native avian and insect species to the area, said Kerns — species that had, in

many cases, disappeared from the landscape over the last decade. Wildflowers bloom in every direction, adding a riot of color to the drab concrete face of Security's building.

The habitat is also growing, noted Kerns, spreading from Security's site onto unused land next door — a sure sign that decision to treat rain and ground water runoff naturally isn't having a negative impact on the environment.

"The habitat has worked out well — to the point where some of the businesses surrounding us are thinking of doing the same thing," he said. "And all of what we've done is voluntary — none of it was mandated.

"That's because our president felt that we should go out and do what should be done. We felt that if we raised the standard, hopefully, others would follow. That would do nothing but good for our industry." ■